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ABSTRACT

A study was done of higher education evening students in order to both generate information about this increasingly important student constituency and to provide students with a hands on demonstration of research methods. Forty-one undergraduate students in an introductory psychology class designed, distributed and analyzed a survey questionnaire to a study population of 1,499 undergraduate and graduate evening students enrolled at Armstrong State College (Georgia). Of those surveyed, 444 responded. Results of the survey indicated that (1) the average age of evening students was 28; (2) females outnumbered males; (3) not enough classes were scheduled in the evening; and (4) most did not have much time for intramural activities. The students who conducted the study garnered an appreciation for research methods and saw the results of their efforts. Students participated in communicating the results of the study to school administrators and to a local newspaper. As a consequence of the research findings a budget proposal was made to create the position of night administrator and a revised evening program brochure was printed indicating expanded hours for some services. In addition, some departments successfully expanded evening and late afternoon class offerings. Included are eight figures/tables; the survey form is included.

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The Evening Student Survey:
A Teaching Tool and a Tool for Change

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HE 025 543

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was twofold. The goals were to provide students with a hands on demonstration of research methods and to generate information about an increasingly important student constituency - the evening student. A survey questionnaire was designed, distributed and analyzed by an introductory psychology class. The focus of the survey was the concerns and needs of students attending evening classes As a result of this project the students involved garnered an appreciation for research methods first hand and saw the results of their efforts. This was a true active learning experience. In addition, the information produced by the 444 students who participated in the survey led to a budget proposal for an evening administrator, expanded hours for some college services and additional evening courses. This was a valuable teaching tool that led to positive change.

The Evening Student Survey:
A Teaching Tool and a Tool for Change

The purpose of this project was twofold. The goals were to provide students with a hands on demonstration of research methods and to generate information about an increasingly important student constituency. The research method selected for this project was the survey questionnaire. The class participating in this project was enrolled in an introductory psychology course conducted in the evenings. The students decided that the focus of their survey would be the concerns of students attending evening classes.

We, as educators, are currently hearing more and more about the benefits of active learning. In fact, active learning was one of the main areas of concern addressed at the National Teaching Conference on Enhancing the Quality of Undergraduate Education in Psychology held in June, 1991. One of the values of hands on learning is that the whole person is involved in the learning process (Walton, 1989). In an attempt to provide students with an active learning experience, conducting a limited research project was made a component of a general psychology course.

Another area of increasing importance to educators is the adult learner. Our institutions of higher education are currently experiencing the projected 30%

increase in adult student enrollment that was predicted by Lightner in 1984 in a presentation at the National Conference of the Society of Educators and Scholars. According to The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac (1991), 63.6 percent of all college students are age 25 or over. The growth in the number of adult learners is leading to an influx of attendence at evening classes (Caya & Gugino, 1989). The value of the adult learner to institutions of higher learning is accelerating as the enrollment of traditional students decreases with the declining birthrate.

As Bruce (1991) stated, the increased presence of the adult learner on college campuses is generating new vitality and enthusiasm. Accompanying this growth is a need for alternative programming and services. For the prerequisite planning to be effective, input from the evening students themselves should be considered. Institutional research can be effectively combined with academic expertise in order to provide the foundations for future planning. Further, this research process can be effectively utilized as a teaching tool.

Method

Subjects

The 41 undergraduate students enrolled in an evening general psychology course actually conducted the research under the supervision of their instructor and

these students were the subjects involved in the active learning portion of this project. The research was primarily a component of their classwork, but students also volunteered to participate in the project during out of class times.

Of the 1,499 undergraduate and graduate evening students enrolled at Armstrong State College the quarter during which the survey was conducted (Department of Administrative Computing, 1991), 444 students responded to the survey. Surveys were provided to every evening class instructor to be distributed to all evening students. Participation was strictly voluntary. Further demographics are reported in the Results section.

Materials

The Evening Student Survey consisted of a one page 15 item questionnaire designed by the students (see Table 1). The questions were directed to the following issues: ability to obtain the degree by only attending evening classes; participation in intramurals including interest, naming specific activities and convenient times; allocation of fees; course offerings and time schedules; and interest in classes scheduled on Saturdays. Demographic information regarding age, sex, hours enrolled, time work day ends and undergraduate or graduate status was also solicited. One question was

EVENING STUDENT SURVEY

Table 1

1. Age _____ 2. Sex _____

3. Work Day Ends Time _____

4. How many hours are you enrolled for this quarter? _____

5. Are classes scheduled so that you can obtain your degree by only attending evening classes?
   Yes or No

6. Are you active in any intramural activity (Past or Present)?
   Yes or No
   If yes, which one _____
   If no, why? Please be specific. _____

7. If (intramural) activities were made available would you use them?
   Yes or No

8. What hours are convenient for you to use facilities related to intramurals?
   a. afternoon M-F 6:00 - 11:00
   b. Saturday Morning _____ Noon _____ Night _____
   c. Sunday Morning _____ Noon _____ Night _____
   d. No times good _____
   (check one)

9. Do you understand the breakdown of tuition and fees?

   1-5 hour 1 portion for class $170.00
   class this 1 portion for student activities $19.50
   Summer 1 portion for Athletic Fee $38.50

   Yes or No

10. If you are not able to use the facilities or don't want to use them, would you prefer a reduction in fees for class?
    Yes or No

11. Do you feel there is a need for more night classes?
    a. More classes of same type offered more times? _____
    b. More classes of different types offered _____
    c. Classes scheduled later in the evening (ie:) _____

12. Please indicate your status:
    Graduate _____ Undergraduate _____

13. Would you attend classes on Saturday?
    Yes or No

14. Would any of your relatives or friends not currently enrolled at Armstrong, attend classes on Saturday?
    Yes or No

15. Other suggestions: (Please write on the back of this sheet)

included to give the survey respondents an opportunity to offer any suggestions of their own.

The Department of Psychology provided the computer printout of class schedules and all standard materials involved in producing and distributing a survey such as paper, xeroxing and use of campus mail services.

Procedure

As part of the coursework on research methods, the students enrolled in a general psychology course decided to survey other evening students to identify their needs. The Psychology Department Head was consulted and the project received enthusiastic support. All department resources were also made available to the students.

The surveying technique selected was a distributed questionnaire (Neale & Liebert, 1986). The advantages of decreasing the time needed to administer the survey and providing uniform results while also reducing experimenter biases (Myers, 1991) were judged to override the disadvantage of self-selection bias among the respondents that can be associated with this form of research (Neale & Liebert, 1986).

The areas of primary concern for the survey were determined through class input. Each student was asked to submit questions that related to concerns they had as evening students. An emphasis was placed on clearly

wording the questions, Layer One, and on the types and the quality of the questions, Layer Two (Labaw, 1985). Students worked in groups to combine areas that addressed similar issues and to reword the questions eventually compiling the proposed survey. The class decided to include a completely open-ended question (Labaw, 1985) for the final survey item so that respondents could add any concerns not previously addressed. The survey was limited to one page and 15 questions in order to keep subject response time to a minimum. The class decided that the population surveyed would be all students enrolled in evening courses defined as beginning at 6:00 p.m. or later.

In order to emphasize the importance of a trial run, a pilot testing procedure was conducted (Neale & Liebert, 1986). The proposed survey was completed by an evening class. Several of the questions were revised for clarity based on the results of the pilot study.

A computer printout was obtained of all course offerings at the college and the students identified the classes held at 6:00 p.m. or later. The department staff ran the required number of copies of the survey along with the accompanying letter. Based on enrollment in each class, students prepared the appropriate number of copies of the final version of the survey which was distributed to instructors for each of their evening

classes through campus mail. Each instructor also received a letter requesting her or his support in allowing the students to complete the surveys during class time. Directions that simply asked the subjects to contribute their input regarding the evening program and a deadline for return to the Department of Psychology were included in the letter. Since there were time restraints in terms of the end of the quarter, instructors were given 10 days to return the completed surveys.

Results

The data from each completed survey were compiled. Statistical analysis was limited to computing frequencies. The respondents were 444 evening students. This was a 30% response rate which was high considering the time frame and that this was an individual class project not involving support from the administration.

In terms of demographics, the overall average age of the respondents was 28 years, Question (#1). Undergraduates were also an average of 28 years old while graduates were an average of 29 years old. Male students had an average age of 31 years and female students an average of 29 years. Undergraduate males reported a mean age of 27 and undergraduate females a mean age of 29. Graduate male students reported a

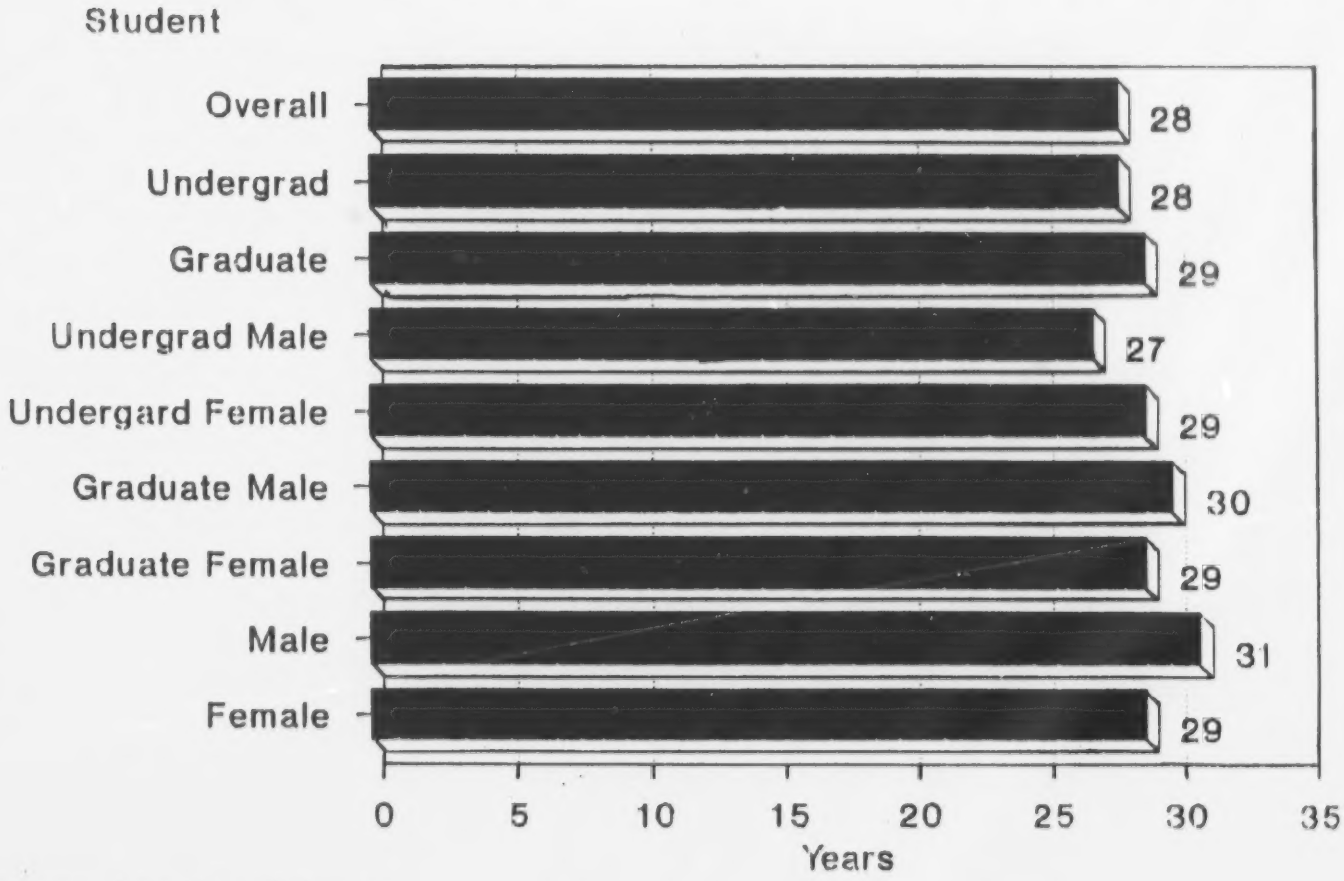
meanage of 30 and graduate female students a mean age of 29 (see Table 2).

There were 272 female students (239 undergraduates and 33 graduates) and 258 male students (140 undergraduate and 18 graduate) who responded to Question (#2) indicating gender. Fourteen students did not reply to this question (see Table 3). Overall, there were 385 undergraduate and 51 graduate respondents (Question #12).

Subjects reported an average course load (Question #4) of 10 hours for that particular quarter with a range of 3 to 23 hours. In response to Question (#3), 328 respondents indicated that their work day ended before 4:00 p.m. and 116 that it ended later than 4:00 p.m.

The remaining questions involved issues of concern to an evening student. In terms of scheduling (Question #5), 361 subjects stated that in their opinion they could not obtain their degree by only attending evening classes while 83 stated that they could complete their degrees (see Table 4). Of the 106 students who reported participating in intramural activities (Question #6), 51 were currently involved and 55 had been in the past (see Table 5). The four most frequently reported intramural activities that students had participated in were flag football, volleyball, softball and basketball. There were 361 students who reported not being involved in

Evening Student Survey
Question 1. Age



Average Age Breakdown

Table 2

EVENING STUDENT SURVEY
QUESTION 2. SEX

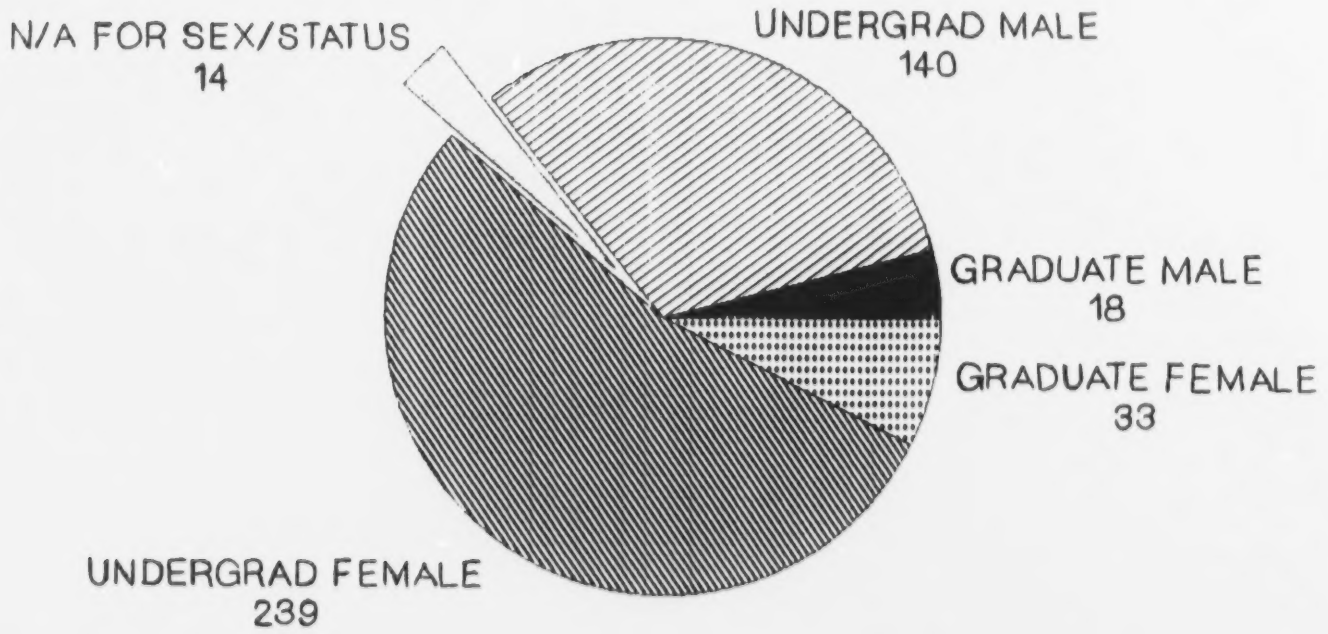


Table 3

Evening Student Survey
Question 5

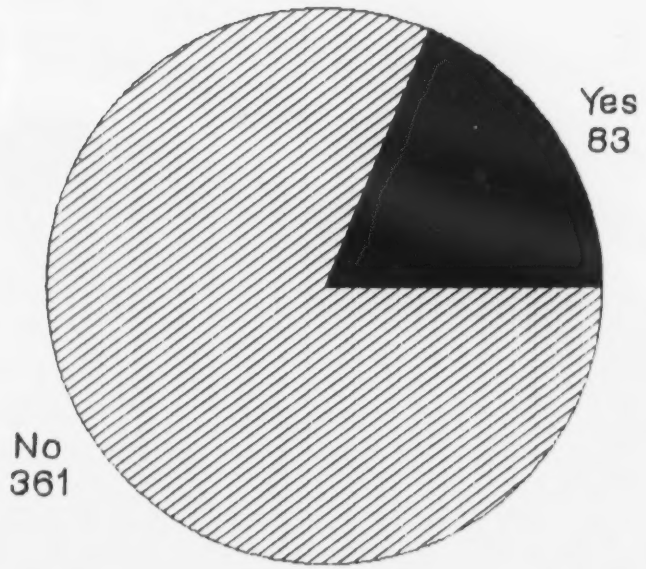


Table 4

Are classes scheduled so that you can obtain your degree by only attending evening classes?

Evening Student Survey
Question 6 - Intramural Activity

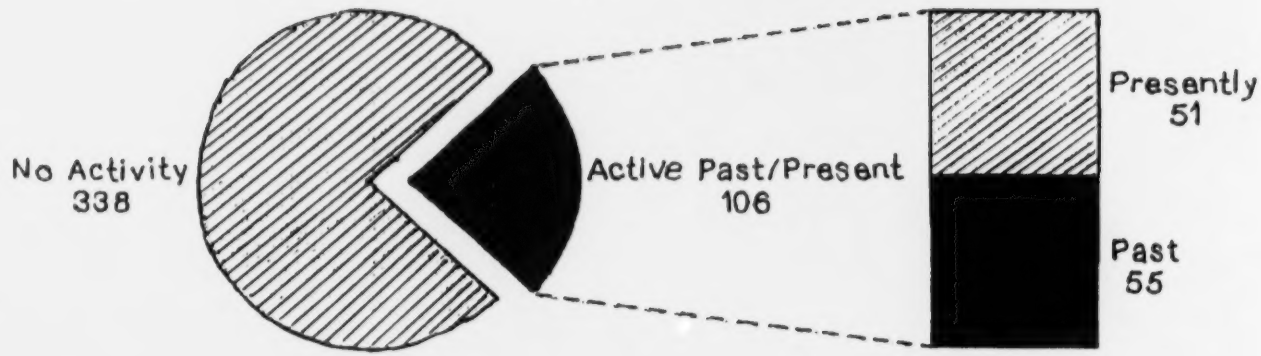


Table 5

13

The Active Past & Present Overlapped

intramurals. For those not involved, 130 students indicated they had no time to be involved with many subjects indicating that job, school and family obligations left no free time. Others indicated that they were not interested (18) and that the activities they were interested in were not available (16). When asked if they would participate if intramurals were made available to them (Question #7), 191 stated that they would and 253 stated they would not.

Students were also asked what hours would be convenient for them to use the intramural facilities (Question #8). Although requested to respond to just one category, most students selected more than one. Students who answered negatively to the previous question regarding participation (#7) did not respond to this question. Evening hours (6:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.) were most often indicated as a convenient time with 125 responses. Saturday morning had 99 positive replies and Saturday afternoon had 76 replies. There were 151 students who stated that no time would be convenient for them (see Table 6).

There were 140 respondents who indicated that they did not understand the tuition and fee structure and 304 who indicated that they did understand the structure (Question #9). In addition, there were 403 responses

Evening Student Survey
Question 8

What Hours are convenient for you to use facilities related to intramurals ?

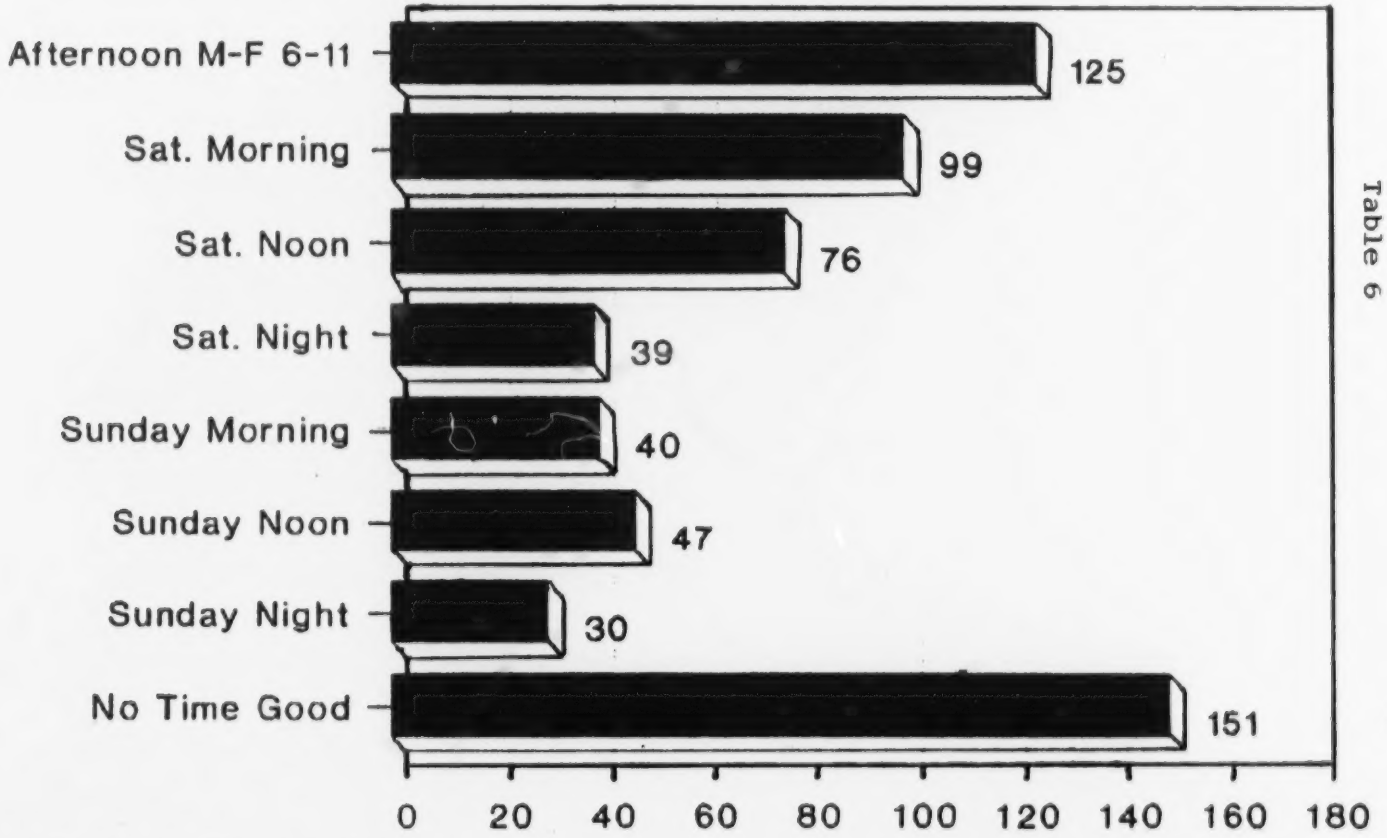


Table 6

15

Many Students Checked More Than One.

Many answered no to question 7.

indicating that the students would prefer a reduction in fees if they are unable or don't want to use intramural facilities (Question #10).

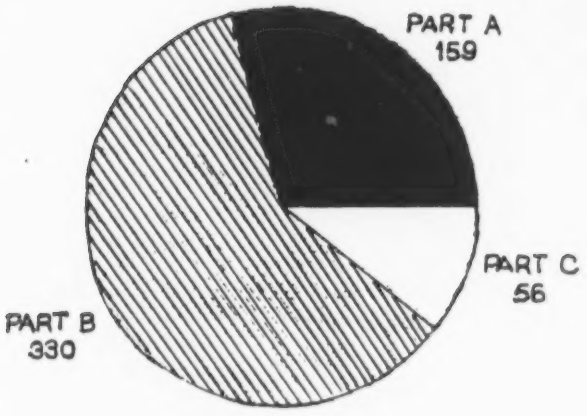
In terms of class scheduling (Question #11), responses indicated that the subjects felt a need for more classes of different types (330), more classes of the same type offered more times (159) and more classes scheduled at later times (56). More than one category could be checked (See Table 7). In addition, 192 students replied to Question #13 indicating that they would attend Saturday classes and 273 responded to Question #14 indicating that they knew family or friends who would be interested in attending on Saturdays (See Table 8).

The final question (#15) was open-ended and asked for other suggestions. There were 80 responses to this item. The focus, 39 reponses, were on issues related to course offerings and scheduling. These suggestions included expanding the summer program and increasing the number and kinds of courses offered and increasing the number of night programs. Other comments primarily related to issues addressed earlier in the survey such as eliminating activity fees with no particular area appearing more than 3 times. It was also suggested that the questionnaire be expanded.

Table 7

EVENING STUDENT SURVEY

QUESTION 11

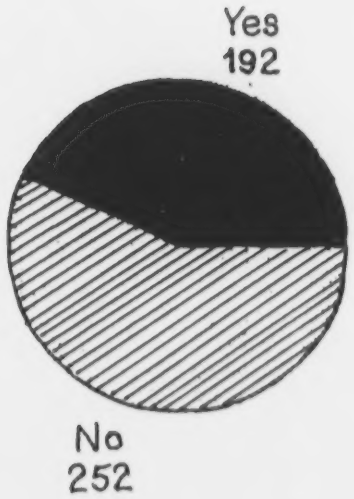


Do You Feel There Is A Need For More Night Classes

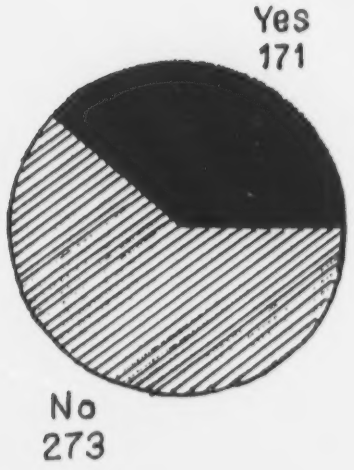
- A. More classes of same type offered more times?
- B. More classes of different types offered?
- C. Classes scheduled later in the evening?

More than one part could be checked.

Evening Student Survey
Questions 13 & 14



Would you attend Saturday classes ?



Would friends or relatives attend Saturday classes ?

Table 8

Discussion

This project achieved both of its objectives. Students garnered an appreciation for research methods first hand and saw the results of their efforts. It was a true active learning process. Hands on experience led to increased enthusiasm for what the students were learning in the classroom. The class also learned from the experience and identified ways in which the research could have been improved. These issues gained relevance as we evaluated the project.

The students also participated in releasing the facts they had collected in their study. The data accumulated were conveyed to the administration. A meeting between students from the class and the administration was held so that the survey date could be discussed. The results were also published as the lead article in the college newspaper.

In addition to reaching the goal of being a teaching tool, this project yielded information important to the college as a whole. Changes relating to these research findings have included a college administration budget proposal to create the position of night administrator. A revised evening program brochure has also been printed indicating expanded hours for some of the college services. Some departments, including psychology, have successfully expanded evening and late

afternoon class offerings. In addition, a follow-up survey is in progress to further identify those students who only attend evening classes and to clarify their concerns. This project proved to be a valuable teaching tool at the same time that it has led to positive change and an increased awareness of evening students as a distinct entity.

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